

## AlertNow Helps District Boost Attendance

When New Hanover County Schools needed to improve attendance, they turned to their existing AlertNow service to deliver regular targeted attendance notifications to thousands of parents. According to Denise Angevine, the district's enrollment specialist, "AlertNow has been a valuable resource in our attendance efforts over the past year, and we look forward to continued improvement in the years ahead."

### **CHALLENGE:** To Increase Student Attendance and Success, While Staying Within Budget Constraints

Located in Wilmington, North Carolina, New Hanover County Schools is the twelfth largest district in the state and serves 24,000 students. The district operates 42 schools, including three pre-K centers, 25 elementary schools, seven middle schools, six high schools, and a Performance Learning Center. Approximately 40 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and a little more than half of schools are Title I-eligible.

With school attendance playing a major role in student success, New Hanover is continually working to decrease student absences. For the district, ensuring parents were aware of student absences was key, and yet budget constraints dictated any notification solution needed to leverage existing technology. According to Angevine, "We're in a budget crisis at the moment, and we're always facing problems with communication between parents and teachers."

### **SOLUTION:** The AlertNow Communication Service

While the district had implemented the AlertNow service in 2007, the service had been used for general, district-wide messaging only. "We were using AlertNow to communicate with our families about school closures and other information. We weren't using it for reminders or attendance," said Angevine. "In 2008, I attended an AlertNow training session for high school principals, and it was during that time that some of the principals expressed interest in using the service for attendance notification."

The district developed a process to integrate daily attendance data from their existing student information system into the AlertNow service, and by the 2008-2009 school year, AlertNow was in use for attendance notification by all district principals. While messages are recorded by each school's principal—"we recommend that principals recorded messages to introduce themselves"—delivery and follow-up is managed by the district's data managers. "Before the school year begins, we show our data

#### Quick Facts

- ) *More than 23,000 students*
- ) *Encompasses 24 elementary schools, 8 middle schools and 6 high schools*
- ) *Located around Wilmington on North Carolina's Atlantic Coast*



managers at each school how easy it is to compile and create custom calling lists with AlertNow,” said Angevine. “The data manager is then responsible for sending the messages to the parents of each absent student.”

“We’re still just amazed that we’ll put out a call to our 24,000 students and it’s done in 25 minutes. It’s amazing. AlertNow has been a valuable resource in our efforts over the past year, and we look forward to continued improvement in the years ahead.”

Denise Angevine  
*Enrollment Specialist*  
*New Hanover County School District*

## **RESULTS:** Improved Communications Lead to Greater Student Success

By using the AlertNow service to deliver consistent, timely absence notifications, the district has demonstrated a commitment not only to student achievement but to parent engagement. New Hanover Chief Communications Officer Valita Quattlebaum notes, “Often, a parent will contact the school with a message along the lines of ‘Thank you for letting me know, I wasn’t aware that my child missed school today.’ By improving communications, our schools are able to establish relationships with parents that reinforce the school’s dedication to student success.” Feedback from administrators has also been positive. “Our principals have been very happy with the results AlertNow delivers as we seek to improve student attendance,” observes Quattlebaum.

The service’s customization capability has been instrumental in ensuring messages are appropriately targeted. “At the high school level, we can let parents know that their student

missed at least one class period, or more than one period, or the entire day. Our high schools, in particular, have benefitted from using AlertNow for absence notifications,” says Quattlebaum. At the elementary level, notifications assume more of a warning function: parents need to be kept informed if younger children don’t make it to school. “Our elementary schools use the notifications to alert parents when kids don’t arrive. That way if something has happened at the bus stop or the child has been picked up by someone they weren’t supposed to be picked up by, we can notify the parents very early.”

The district continues to use the AlertNow service for general notifications and weather warnings. “This is the first year that we’ve had snow a couple of times, so we used it a lot for closings and two-hour delays. Our administrative team has login information with them at all times, so any one of us can get online and send a message out at any time.” Weather experts are predicting above-average hurricane activity for the fall of 2010, and the district plans to leverage AlertNow to address both session closures and community awareness. “AlertNow has changed how we get news out during inclement weather, especially to our non-English speaking population,” said Angevine. “Before we began using AlertNow, many of our parents would miss what was happening because the information we sent out was in English. With AlertNow, we can deliver messages in multiple languages.”

AlertNow’s round-the-clock customer care team has played a significant role in ensuring the district’s ongoing satisfaction with the service. “My experience with AlertNow has been very good. Every time I call the help desk I get an answer to my question. They are very accommodating with anything specific we want to learn how to do,” said Angevine. “And we’re still just amazed that we’ll put out a call to our 24,000 students and it’s done in 25 minutes. It’s amazing. AlertNow has been a valuable resource in our efforts over the past year, and we look forward to continued improvement in the years ahead.”

